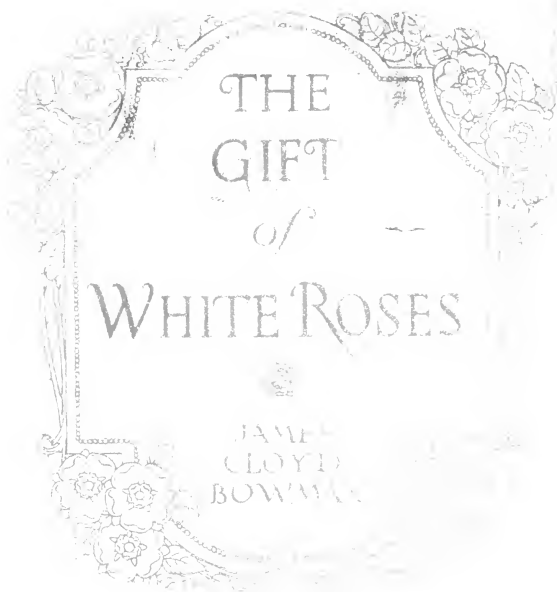


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I WOULD NOT WORK TO RUIN
OTHER LIVES, WHETHER THE
PRIZE BE PAID IN GREEDY GOLD




Class 7


Book 1

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THE NORMAL LIFE IS THE
LIFE OF RIGHT, THAT
TOILS FOR OTHERS WITH
MATCHLESS MIGHT, ITS
WAGES IS ENDLESS GAIN



THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

BOOKS BY
JAMES CLOYD BOWMAN

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THE ROMANCE OF A YOUTHFUL KNIGHT WHO
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YOUNG MANHOOD AND ITS YOUNG WOMANHOOD
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The Gift of White Roses

By

JAMES CLOYD BOWMAN



THIRD REVISED EDITION

THE PILGRIM PRESS
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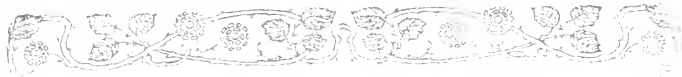
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TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE COMPASSION UPON THEIR
ERRING BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHO ARE PRONE NOT
TO CAST A STONE BUT TO GIVE A LOAF AND A PILLOW,
THIS STORY IS DEDICATED.



THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Sleep, my little one, sleep, my dear one,
Sleep, sleep, sleep;
The sun with drowsy eyelids drifts adown the bound-
less deep;
The cares of day grow weary as the evening shadows
creep;
And silence loiters everywhere and lulls the world to
sleep;
Sleep, my little one, sleep, my dear one,
Sleep, sleep, sleep.

Sleep, my little one, sleep, my dear one,
Sleep, sleep, sleep;
The angels will with gladsome joy the nightly vigils
keep,
Will waft you to their isle of dreams with balmy
buoyant sweep,
While mystic music mellows every murmur into sleep;
Sleep, my little one, sleep, my dear one,
Sleep, sleep, sleep.

The father tried to hide his thoughtful care,
As thus the anxious mother o'er and o'er
Crooned to her first-born babe this tender strain;
For baby pain had plucked away repose;

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

But song, the Orpheus soother of the soul,
At length o'ercame the weary throbbing brain,
And stilled it into soothing peaceful dreams.

The spring had come with all its heavenly bliss;
The birds, the winged angels of the earth,
With their return, had drawn another thread
Across the woof of years; the flowers unveiled
Their fairy faces to the coaxing sun,
And whispering spread the season's melodies,
That man might easier catch them ere they fled;
The forests shed their gladness everywhere,
Till all the world was focused in a smile.

The baby silenced from its fretful care,
The mother raised her voice in accents soft:

MOTHER.

Yes, this is spring,—within the cradle and
Without the door. We should indeed be glad;
These beauteous cherubim of heavenly light
Would so enfold us that, though weak and blind,
No sin could evermore come near us, would
We but allow them. Look, my husband, here
Within the baby crib,—this holy form,
This angel-molded house of clay, this face
That knows but sweetest innocence and peace.
We ought forevermore to keep it thus,
To guard it as a frail unfolding rosebud,
Against the lurking parasites of sin.—
And look beyond the cradle, where the sun,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

The bridegroom of the day, with sweetest smiles,
Now lingers down the darkening aisles of night.
He sheds his parting perfumes everywhere,
Until the world is all aflood with joy.
Ought we not thus, in love, prolong our spring
Of married happiness, that this, the joy
And sunshine of our home, may find no blight
In the environment we've formed for her?

FATHER.

We ought, not only ought, but will, dear wife.—
But wait a minute.—Here, this pledge from me,
A token that our constant aim and joy
Shall be in happiness for her, ourselves,
And God. Take this, a new-blown nosegay, plucked
With loving care, these roses, snowy-white;
Take these, and wheresoe'er you see again
Their likeness, think of them and this my vow.

The twilight lengthened; and the maid of night,
The moon, through all the etherial vaulted sky,
Relit the million tapers of the night,
And everything was peace and quiet cheer.

Only a few more years,
Only a little while,
Our darling daughter that's wrapped in dreams,
Will be in all a sunlit smile;
She'll be the fairest lily-bell
That blooms in many a mile.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

II

When the cradle bed has flown,
And the baby feet have grown,
And the tiny steps have lengthened on the floor,
When the darling form goes bounding
To the school-bell's call resounding,
Then the world of fear and doubt peers through the
door.

'Twas thus the mother sat and mused alone,—
The little girl's first day away at school.
The sunny smile and laughter now was hushed,
The noisy prattle stilled within the home,
The thousand little cares and joys were flown,
The playthings stowed away forevermore
In silent waiting for the vanished hand;
And mingled hopes and fears played hide and seek,
About the quietude within the room,
That raised forebodings in the mother's breast,
Throughout the long-drawn quiet restless day.
At length, the evening came, and with it came
The daughter, radiant with sunny charms,
Babbling with laughter, brimming o'er with joy
And elfish prattle. Soon the twilight fell
And silenced the wild wonder of the day,
And wrapped the wearied child in hushed repose.
But still the mother's mind was ill at ease;
A misty halo hid the evening star,
The star of peace and hope within her breast.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

The fall had come in radiant rainbow gleams,
Had cast its hazy veil o'er all the land,
Its finger streaked the leaves with colored light,
And yet the fear of winter made them sigh
And shiver in the cooling autumn breeze.
They sat upon the porch beneath the moon,
That shed its beams along the parted clouds
That brushed its face. The wife at length began:

MOTHER.

My husband, I am sad and troubled much;
I fear our darling will go wrong. Our town
Is wicked, oh so wicked. How I wish
We lived far out in some lost wilderness
That Satan had not yet debased.

FATHER.

That wish
Fits only heaven, for heaven's the only place
That's banished him. But why be anxious, Dear,
You'll feel at ease when 'tis morning and the cares
Today has brought have slipped away in sleep.

MOTHER.

I wish I could; but still, I somehow fear
I shall not cease this longing till the years
Have ripened this fair bud to womanhood,
For everywhere lie snares that crouch and wait
To blight the life that now is pure and fair.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

FATHER.

That's why you should not fear; with soul so pure
And form so perfect, she could stem the throne
Of Satan with no fear of harm.

MOTHER.

With form

So fair,—I wish that she were homely as
She's fair. Her beauty is the very worst
Of all her enemies.

FATHER.

You'd have her

Unadorned, with spinster's visage. But I'm glad
She's perfect as a sculptured angel.—
Were't not for you, I'd wish myself again
A boy, her age, that I might grow beside her
With but one thought, to woo and win her.

MOTHER.

Yes,

Who knows, the saloon-keeper's son may even now,
Be thinking to himself, the very thought
You thus have counterfeited, who can tell?

FATHER.

I know you're ill, to think of him, that's reared
As is a captive condor, in a cage
Where he can never rise and soar among
The mountain peaks of lofty thought, or live

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Aright the instincts of his inmost soul;
To think that he should dream of her, is weak
And foolish; better contrast heaven and hell,
For they would sooner woo and wed than these.

MOTHER.

You cannot tell, for he is wondrous fair,
As fair almost as our own precious girl;
Besides, the strange and monstrous oft-times happen.
Would it were as impossible as 'tis
Within your certain thought.—Were I a man—

FATHER.

Were women men, they'd nevermore be angels;
But—

MOTHER.

Say what you will, were I a man,
I'd see the one saloon, one hive that swarms
With bees, that carry treasures in, and then
Unlike the bees are sent away to bear
The curse of hell upon their dazed foreheads,—
I'd see it closed.

FATHER.

You'd furnish gossip then
For all the town.

MOTHER.

Be as it would, I'd do it.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

FATHER.

It cannot harm us; furthermore, it needs
Must be,—it lightens taxes. And it's like
Another place of business; you go in,
It takes you not.

MOTHER.

If that were only true?—
It may, in time, rob us of all our joy.

FATHER.

Enough! We'll neither be convinced. What use
Of being, now, thus drawn to useless quarrel?

The dark clouds thickened; and the moon blew out
The million tapers of the sky, and bivouacked
On the billowy bosom of the night.
And so the mother, half in anger, half
In fear and mingled hope, was lost in dreams.

Who can tell what the years will bring?

Who can tell?

What will become of our darling girl,

Who can tell?

No one knows save the Father above;

Yet, we trust that God is only love;

But what will become of our little dove,

Who can tell?

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

III

Out of the way of the world
Of its buffet and babble and scorn;
Out of the way of the world,
Of its wearied and wasting and worn;
To the hearts that in unity share
Every mingled pleasure and care,
To the sympathy no-where-else lent,
To the only true lasting content,
To the cheer and the joy and the love,
To the sunshine strewn bright from above;

Out of the way of the world,
Though however wide we may roam,—
This alone is home.

FATHER.

Yes, this is home, the far-famed oasis
Within the parching desert world; the lone
Unfailing shelter for our lives of storm;
The compass and the comfort of our souls;
God's illustration of his boundless love.
Yes, this is home, for concord cheers our hearth,
And, too, our toil has yielded plenteous fruits
That we shall never want, and God has filled
Our cup to overflowing, in our child.

MOTHER.

Yes, we at last are free from every care;
And comfort smiles upon our future path

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

With tempting radiance. Yes, my fears were foolish,
For she is as fair as any one
Could wish, as gentle, modest, and as pure,
As could be dreamed of anywhere. Her tastes
Would fit her guardian angel's glad approval.
Truly, this is home.

FATHER.

Listen! her voice;
Let's in and hear her sing.—We'd have you sing
Again, the song we love the most to hear,
The song, of all, that is appropriate.

MARY.

What? 'Home Sweet Home'?

MOTHER.

Yes, that's the one of all
We love the best.

MARY.

Then 'tis of all, the one
I ought the most to sing. You are so kind
To me, that I am ever pleased to do
Your bidding. But we must sing together, then
'Twill be of all sweet songs most beautiful,
Of all sweet songs the most appropriate.

FATHER.

Come on, wife, this is comfort, this is home.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MOTHER.

Yes, really it is, with naught to mar.

(All sing)

‘Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home’!

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

IV

It was the time when wild flowers blow,
When perfumes pure and rare
Were wafted out on every air,
It was the time when lilies grow
With all about atune to them,
With every thought the purest gem,
With naught of discord or of woe.

It was a day when Nature caught
A million years within an hour,
When one beyond himself might tower
To grasp the Infinite in thought.
It was a day in Nature's reign
That never could return again,
Save in remembered fancy wrought.

It was an hour when every clod
Seemed focused in one perfect dream,
When Nature all aglow did gleam
With untold images of God;
When life was poesy and song,
When self was held aloof from wrong,
For Love, triumphant, walked abroad!

MARY.

What shall I do? What shall I do?—
It matters not. When it is through,
'Twill break two hearts, whate'er I do.
Thus dreaming pensively, alone she went;

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

The clover bowed its head as she passed by,
The roses drooped in meekness as she came,
All nature paused, entranced by her fair form,
As lightly, on the wings of morning air,
She softly tripped, the one flower wondrous fair
Of all the spring.

JOHN.

Come out to me, my Love,
Come out, come out to me;
The world's a-May, do not delay,
But come, come out to me.
Life's in the spring, the birds a-wing,
And Love is king, and Love is king!
Oh come, come out to me.
My heart will break, unless you wake,
Unless you come, my soul is dumb,
Unless you come to me.
Come out!

'Twas thus the lover wrapped in raptures wild,
Within the sheltering covert of the wood,
Mused but of her, who lingering, loitering came,
Who lingered long, half-wishing she had stayed.
And still she could not stay. Her heart was here,
Her home was there; her love was here, although
None knew.

JOHN.

She comes! my heart's aglow! oh, why
Does she thus linger, when my every hope
Is in her blushing smile? See, now she stoops

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

To pluck a daisy from its nodding stem;
But she is queen of every flower that blows.—
She comes again in artless grace.—O, Love,
The minutes are long years when thus you linger.—
That's not a tear upon your cheek I see?—
You would be smiles did you but know this heart
Aright.—Do not thus pain me now, I die
To see you smile.

MARY.

Then, here's a smile for you.—
There, is your heart content?

JOHN.

Yes, Love.

MARY.

Then I
Am glad I feigned it, though it pained me through.

JOHN.

Don't say it, Love. 'Feign' blights my hope.—
The sun
Is dark, the air is cold, the birds are hoarse,
For that one word.

MARY.

That word was not for you;
Could you but read my thoughts, then never maid
Were truer in her love than I.

JOHN.

Oh, now
The sun is bright, the air's surcharged with scent

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Of clover meadows, and the birds are drunk
With honeyed song.—But why thus sad?

MARY.

Sad's not
The word to use; say throbbing piercing pain.
I cannot move but some dear heart will break.—
My parents, did they even dream that you
Were here, would rather I were dead, than have
Me cast one coldest glance your way.—And I
Were I to now go back to them, two hearts,
Two loving hearts would thus be crushed. What can
I do? Think you I ought to smile when hearts
Are breaking for that smile; think you that I
Should weep, when hearts are drowning in the tears?
Would that my face were double as I force it,
That this might smile for you, and that for them.

JOHN.

Yes, this is hard; I cannot see why they
Thus envy me, who never did them wrong,
For though I smile on you, the smile is pure.—
They say I'm reared upon the greed of blood.
It is not true! my mother is a Christian,
Meek as any saint. She's daily urged
That father close his shameful, wicked business,
For her sake, and her son's. She is a Christian,
Though she's shunned by all her kin. The curse
Is on us for his business; and on me
Thus doubly, for at times, an unquenched thirst

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Has come—I've seldom yielded though—but since
I first beheld you, blushing fairer than a rose,
Since first you smiled on me your smile of love,
The thirst is quenched; and all I ever crave
Is just your angel presence near. For you
Are in my thought a million times a day,
Are everywhere, in everything I see.—
But why this trembling like a captured dove?

MARY.

Methinks I see some form there, moving near.
Is it my father, who perchance mistrusts?—
No, it is but a listless, grazing cow.—
But we must farther out into the forest,
Where no one's eye save God's alone can see;
And as He knows our hearts, He will rejoice,
Nor spread the gossip on the winged air.—
We go.—Pluck there for me those nodding glowing
Violets.

JOHN.

They do not glow. Could you
But contrast them with your bright sunny smile,
You, too, would say that they are common yellow.

MARY.

There, pluck that dainty dreamy Wind-Flower
Trembling e'en in this faint breeze, that waxen
Moon-beam, tucked away by night's forgetful hand.

JOHN.

'Tis fair, but you are fairer far than this;
You are the waxen smile of heaven, that angels

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Breathed o'er your birth hour, and then in awe
Of beauty, durst not claim again, for fear
Of robbing earth and me of all that's fair.

MARY.

Waste not, thus wild and lavishly, on me
These love perfumes, distilled from your true heart.
I'm not more fair as woman than you as man.
Heaven made us each the other's counterpart.
Yet beauty in the form is naught unless
It's mantled o'er a lovely heart. But we
Most happily, are both thus wrought and nerved.

JOHN.

You're quite immoderate to paint us thus;
Though I am sure that we were wed in heaven
The selfsame hour in which we both were born.—
But this is paradise!

MARY.

Here, this Spring Beauty.

JOHN.

Yes, it was named aright, 'tis beautiful,
'Tis even so; but you, my Love, are Beauty;
And 'tis chaste, but you are Chastity.
Would they had named you sweet Angelica,
Instead of Mary; still that name profanes,
It should be simply 'Angel,' that's of all
The only name that fits you.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MARY.

Nay. Mary!

She was e'en the nearest Angel earth has seen.
The Lord searched waiting centuries before
He found, in all the world, the woman
He dared trust to rear His Son. Say Mary always;
'Tis the sweetest name 'neath heaven. But John
Methinks is common. John? But John became
The one beloved Disciple. That were name
Enough to fit a king. But anyway,
A common name is most uncommon
In a man of worth.

JOHN.

But this is heaven to stand
Beneath your smile.

MARY.

Yes, but it cannot last;
My little hour is spent. Would it might spin
Its silent thread out into long, long years.—
How can I back into my home again,
And leave you now? Would we might ever here
Be fixed in an eternal spring of love
Inspired by breezes of perpetual joy.—
I must not loiter or they may suspect
I'm long in gathering these few fading flowers.
And yet, how can I go?—O cruel time,
How can you part us thus, 'tis but a half-spent
Minute since I wandered here. But I
Must go.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

JOHN.

Stay! Not so soon. 'Twill be long years
Till night again throws its protecting mantle
O'er us.

MARY.

But you will come! Come quickly, night!

JOHN.

I hope this longing soon will cease. It pains
Me we must meet like villainous thieves within
The shielding darkness. Is there not some way
We may break the secret?

MARY.

Would there were;
But heaven is pleased to have us wait still longer.
Say not 'good-bye,' say rather, 'welcome night.'
I go,—not singly, for you're ever near.

JOHN.

And I go mated, too.

(Alone.)

When will this waiting cease?

When will the time be come

For this airy angel to be my bride?

For our wedded spirits, side by side,

To labor together whatever betide?

When will the time be come?

Till then, my heart, be true as steel,

Till then stay Love and set the seal

That binds our hearts for woe or weal,

Till the loitering time be come.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

V

We weave in silence secretly
The fabric of our lives,
And no one knows what enters in,
What thought at last survives;
But when we feel the most secure
And safe in hiding there,
Some force tears wide the mystic web,
And lays each woof thread bare.

As when the blind plant, groping wildly for light,
Finally bursts into bloom with the newness of day;
As when the young fledgeling first finds its lone voice,
And the instinct within it sheds wildly its lay;
As when the meek lily, with head drooping low,
Holds aloft in its chalice a spherule of dew
That the sun in its radiance resplendent shines
through,
And illumines all its soul with a rare crystal hue:
So Mary tripped homeward reborn from above,
With her whole soul aflame with the wild dream of
love,
Unknowing the gods from their seats in the sky
Flung her every known grace as she lightly tripped
by,
Unknowing the arrows that pierced her hid breast,
Protruded their points in her eyes' wild unrest.
Ah strange, we can read in the uncovered eye
The thoughts of the mind, howe'er hidden they lie;

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Ah strange, we can peep through their half-open
portal,
See the image that's stamped on the spirit immortal;
Yet we carry forever, and always reveal
Our soul in our eyes, though we would it conceal.

MOTHER.

You're home again?

MARY.

Yes, mother, I am home.

MOTHER.

I know not why, my daughter, but the hour
Seemed long and lonely.

MARY.

Oh, it seemed so short,
Scarce half so long as many minutes
I have passed.

MOTHER.

I do not understand you, daughter,
Hearts that love speak thus.

MARY.

Yes, and I love,—
I love the flowers; methinks that I could spend
Long years without a wasted minute thus
Among the lovely blossoms of the wood.
I would have stayed another hour, and yet
Another and another till 'twas night,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Were it not for your anxious thought of me.
I know not why you thus should be afraid.

MOTHER.

I fear there's other love than simply flowers;
The love of flowers comes only when we love
Some person e'en—

MARY.

I love you, mother dear,
And father,—every one and everything.

MOTHER.

That's why I fear there's other love.

MARY.

But mother,
You have ever feared.—I know not why,
E'en when a little child, I heard you oft
Tell father, when you knew not that I heard,
That you oft feared for me. Why should you thus?

MOTHER.

You're ever in a dreamy lover's mood;
Listless you glide about, you leave your books,
Your music only adds its wings to these
Your dreams; I'm sure you dream of someone,
somewhere,
That we do not know.

MARY.

I cannot lie;
I will not say I do not dream, and oft.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Pray, what unmarried woman is there 'neath
The sun that does not dream of someone dearer
Far to her than all things else?

MOTHER.

Then mother
Ought to know, to still this longing fear.

MARY.

Not yet; enough it is to tell you, he
Deserves the love I give him, but his name,
I cannot tell you that.

MOTHER.

Could you, my daughter,
Know the joy you'd bring, by telling me,
You'd do it now.

MARY.

No, mother, if you cannot
Trust what I have told you now thus far,
That he deserves my love, then you would not
Believe or cease to fear, were I to tell
The fuller secret. But you do me wrong
To rob the only hidden chamber
I have ever tried to keep concealed from you.
But time will quite unfold its unknown depths,
Much as the spring unfolds the rosebud's heart.
But for the present, you will have to trust,
And thus believe that he deserves my love.

MOTHER.

I would believe it, were it not for one—

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MARY.

Press me no further; this is far enough.

As when the blast of autumn comes unseen,
And drifts the chilling storm, unheralded,
O'er perfumed bowers, and hushes the glad songs
Of all the birds, and wakes within each breast
The instinct for a far-off summer clime;
As when the lightning breaks, unseen, unheard,
And tears the clinging ivy from the oak,
And flings it helpless with a thousand wounds,
Its hopes all crushed, its towering beauty gone;
As when a mountain torrent rushes wild
Across the blushing plain, and in its might,
Uproots a helpless lily, drooping poised,
And drops it dripping in a far-off dell:
So troubles come unseen, unheralded,
And from the inmost heart of hearts uproot
The delicate and hidden springs of joy.
So, Mary, all her being flushed with pain,
Burning in anguish, passed into her room;
Alone within her chamber mused and wept.

MARY.

What will become of me? I could not tell
A lie, e'en pressed thus hard.—Now mother knows,
At least within her mind; the secret's out!
Oh cruel hour that thus has robbed my life!
'Tis home no longer: had she only known,
But guessed, the meaning of her wounding words,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

She would not thus have asked for all the world.
Kind angels, why did you not somehow tell her?—
Oh let me weep, for home is ended.
Evermore; and yet how can it be? Must I
Break both the hearts that thus have reared my life?
I cannot do it. Who had ever thought,
Though true, I must be false in this dark hour.
I dare not tell my parents; they would hedge
About me such a wall, that the rising sun
Could find no crevice for his brightest beam;
A nunnery were freedom side of this.
I cannot tell them, though the one I choose
Is worthy, for society uplifts
Its warning finger in a scornful No;
A chasm's drawn between his home and mine
That I, with all my pleadings, cannot span.—
Still he is mine!—But I am theirs!—Though not
For life! Oh let me drown my grief in tears.

Alone within her chamber thus she wrought
Her prayers and tears; there fought twixt home and
love.

And listlessly, her fingers wove a wreath
Of wild flowers, nodding on their broken stems,
As from the silence of their hidden depths,
They smiled contentedly, though bruised and crushed.
And in her soul she heard them sweetly say:
'Be patient! Be contented with your lot!
For faith and hope and love are never crushed.
The smile that's mantled o'er with briny tears

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Is worth a world of gay frivolity
And lack of feeling. Sorrow melts the soul,
Burns out the worthless dross, refines the gold.'
And in her innocence, she kissed the flowers;
As one by one she saw each upturned smile,
And answered to their silent brave appeal:
'God's good. I'll ever love and hope and trust.'

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

VI

There are joys in all our sorrows,
There are thistles through our flowers,
There are vales between our mountains,
There are tests for all our powers;
Happy he who meets his trials
With a steadfast trustful eye,
Happy he who through life's darkness
Sees some star transfixed on high.

The matchless morn in May had quickly passed;
And moment after moment slipped in silence
Into the great unfinished record
Of the past, as listlessly and all alone
Our youthful lover roamed the quiet wood,
And poured his tale of love into the upturned
Violet's bell, and hid it there within
The forest's deepest depth where none would find,
And then passed on to hear it babbling ever
At his side. And then he flung it deep
Into the sturdy oak's staunch fearless heart;
And as it rustled all its brawny being,
Enkindled with the wild enraptured song,
He felt relieved, and gaily passed, as one
Who 'neath a cloudless sky runs from his shadow.
Still in reverie, he wandered here and there,
Until the shadows of the twilight came
And woke him,—then he hastened breathless home.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MR. AYR.

John, where have you been lingering all the day?
You go about of late as though your thoughts
Were ever on some day dream. But 'twill stop!
This is your birthday, is it not?

JOHN.

It is.

MR. AYR.

Then you're at last a man in years, though not
In motive. I've a plan. 'Tis for your future.
You must choose; you're at the parting paths.
In brief, you now must settle down with me,
Take share in my saloon; or else get out,
Leave home and all you love! I'll have no more
Of this, your worthless dreaming!

JOHN.

Must I leave?

Leave home and mother?

MR. AYR.

No! I did not say it.

JOHN.

You same as said it, for of all things known,
I'll never work at such a business, Sir!

MR. AYR.

Then get you out! You have no share in me
Or mine. Your mother's made a mealy-mouthed
And moral fool of you.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

JOHN.

No use of this.

I would not work to ruin other lives,
Whate'er the price it paid in greedy gold.

MR. AYR.

Then get you out and soil these tender palms!
You'll get this girlish silliness soon cured.

JOHN.

Think you I cannot work? I've never asked
You for a cent in all the years. I've made
My money always; and could you but know
What makes me idle now, you would not blame.

MR. AYR.

Some silly sickly love affair, that's it;
I know you like a book!

JOHN.

Yet cannot read

Between the lines.—There's nothing you can share
With me; our natures are as opposite—

MR. AYR.

I'm mighty glad they are! But why these words?
I've had enough of your soft lily-fingers.
I'll to work. But mind you once for all,
You'll get you out, unless you do my bidding!—
But I will give you all the chance a boy
Can ask; I'll share the half of all I own
With you, if you'll accept.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

JOHN.

Don't thus so tempt
Me, for I could not work as you have planned
E'en though you gave me all.

MR. AYR.

Then out! tonight's
The last you'll ever lounge upon a bed
Of mine! Your mother's stubborn silliness
Breeds this! Would you had senses that befit
A man! I'm gone; ere I am back, decide.
And if you dare say No, I'll say it too;
You'll never put your form within this house
Again, or I'll make jelly of your surly
Mouth! You here! Decide ere I return.

JOHN.

He's gone,—I'm glad he is. Would I were gone
When he returns. I fear this sudden strain
Will set him drinking more; returned, he'll have
A fit of frenzy, thinking thus he'll force
Me into being what I will not choose.
But he can't do it! I'll be tripple steel!—
But mother, can she stand this sudden shock?
Maybe I ought to take his offer now
For her dear sake. But she'd not have it so;
She'd rather her good heart would break, than this.—
And Mary, what, oh what of her! Tonight
May be our last. But 'twill not. I'll not think.—
So I must go! I'll boldly go!—But where?
The world is large and cold and selfish; I fear.—

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

But I can work; I've worked, and can again.
I can come back to mother oftentimes
When he is gone.—But still, his threat is strong;
And he is blunted so by drink, he'd kill me.—
I'll have to leave the town and all I love;
But I had rather heed the call of right,
Although it wrings my heart and makes my world
A wasting desert, than to choose the wrong
And live in luxury on beds of ease.—
O mother, is it you?

MRS. AYR.

Yes, it is I.

I've listened from my room to all you said.
It pains me much to think that you must go;
But I'm rejoiced to know you are a man
Who dares now choose the right.

JOHN.

You are so good,
You are the guardian angel of my life.—
But I must go!

MRS. AYR.

Yes, John, in haste, before
He comes again. Let's to your room at once.

JOHN.

Stay; not so soon!—I cannot go tonight.

MRS. AYR.

You must for my sake; he will soon return
In raving wickedness to force his will.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

He's been determined many years to make
You partner in his business when you came
Of age. He would have had it sooner,
But for me; our bargain was to let you choose.—
I've strengthened my desires by prayer, and he
Has tried to force his plans by wicked threats.
I prayed all night you'd stand the test today.
I know he will accuse me of foul play,
Say I have been untrue, have forced you thus;
But now I'm ready for the worst, if you
But haste away.

JOHN.

I cannot go tonight.

MRS. AYR.

You must not be more tender-hearted than
Your mother.

JOHN.

No, 'tis not that, but she—

MRS. AYR.

But who?

JOHN.

My Love.

MRS. AYR.

Who is she?—but it matters not,
The world is full of 'loves'.

JOHN.

No, there's but one,
But one in all the world for me.—Say but
Tomorrow; any other time.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MRS. AYR.

But haste,
The train will soon be due.

JOHN.

But there's another
Ere the day awakes.

MRS. AYR.

But you must go
On this, before he comes. Come to your room.—
I have these years kept faith in God and you.
Look, I have saved this thousand dollars 'gainst
This hour, if you should choose aright. Take this,
A birthday present, saved in secrecy
From out the years. Be frugal in the spending,
As I have been in the patient gathering.

JOHN.

Mother, how can I live without your love?
In all my life, I have not seen its equal.
But I must go! My treasures one and all
Are stowed away.—Ah no! they're in your hearts.
But I must go! must leave you both! But I
Will write you often, tell you my success!
Your welfare ever will be on my heart.
And if, perchance, he ever dies, then write;
And I will take you to my home and nurse
You in your age as tenderly as you
Have nursed my youth.—A kiss, a parting kiss.
Wipe not the tear let fall upon your cheek

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

By me. Think as it dries, I'll nevermore
Forget your loving life of kindness.—
I must go! The evening shades have darkened
Into night; and so my childhood happiness,
To tears.

MRS. AYR.

May God be pleased to have us meet
Again; 'twill then be joyous as it's sad
Tonight.—Till then, 'good-bye'. And may the Lord
Keep watch between us while we are apart.
Who can measure the mother-love?
Who?
No one can save God above;
No one!
It's tried oft-times
In petty rhymes;
But the ocean's too shallow to dare compare,
And the earth is too narrow and hollow and bare;
Who must measure the mother-love?
Who?
God!

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

VII

When the baby bird's flown from its nest in the elm,
And the sunshine peeps in on an empty abode,
And the mother bird chirps to her mate at her side
As together they dream by the long, lonesome road;
There is something too deep for a tear to express,
There is something too sacred for thought to explore,
There is something now gone that they sigh to caress
As they sink in the thought they shall nevermore
 bless,

When the baby bird's flown from its nest in the elm.

When the baby bird's flown from its nest in the elm,
Has unknowingly broken its frail new-fledged wing,
And can nevermore rise from its far away flight
To return with the joy and the peace it would bring;
It is then that in heaven our God heaves a sigh,
And all nature is sad and in tears moaneth low,
It is then that the mother bird wishes to die,
To be folded, unknowing, forever to lie,
When the baby bird's flown from its nest in the elm.

MOTHER.

Has't come so soon to this? My husband, up!—
The morn shall nevermore awake the earth
As a sweet child from dreams. 'Twill evermore
Be but a parched-up desert. She has flown!
Is there no help! Can we not rescue her!

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

FATHER.

What, wife, why this wild dream?

MOTHER.

Is't but a dream?

A frenzied nightmare?—Then, may God be praised.—
But 'tis not! Read this tear-stained note she left
Within her chamber! Yes, 'tis true! She's flown!
Is there no help? Can we not rescue her?

FATHER.

What, is it true?—We cannot rescue her.
I see it all,—they're married ere the morn,
That pales its rosy cheek in tears to tell
Us this, could wake us.

MOTHER.

Oh! is't even so!
The last hope gone! It can't be; God is Love!
It cannot be!

FATHER.

It's very hard to bear.
We cannot understand our God of Love,
For sometimes He must lead us even through
The valley and the shadow ere we see
Our sins. I see it now! Would I had seen
It many selfish years ago.—And think,
I once had in my hand the power to crush it,
Had I but risen then and struck the blow.
I saw no harm in it to me or mine;

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

That was my sin, and God has punished justly,
For I denied I was my brother's keeper.—
Oh, what have I done?

MOTHER.

You've sold her soul!
Would I had only made you see what I
Saw in a vision many years ago.—
Mine's half the sin, for I, with all my might,
Could have persuaded you.—Has't come to this?

FATHER.

You are too fair and honest in these words,
For mortal woman; yes, we both must share
The burden equally, for doubly we
Can bear the millstone that would break each heart,
If borne alone.

MOTHER.

O God, I know not
If 'twill last. My heart is almost broken now.
My hope has fled! Shall we not somehow try
To rescue her and bring her safely home?
Could we not bear her husband round our hearth,
If she'd return? Let's bid them welcome home:
Perchance, they'll come.

FATHER.

No, wife,—She'll come 'alone',
If we but bide our time. Do you not see
These tearstains here upon her parting note?
That drunkard's son that has beguiled her thus,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Will soon betray her; then she'll come alone.
Too true, she'll bring a bleeding, broken heart,
And tears and taints of sin. 'Twill not be she,
The joyous angel, flitting fairy-like
Around, as once she did.—It can't be changed
By us, nor can we bear the viper that
Has thus so deadly bitten at our hearts.

MOTHER.

It would not be my way. But it may be
The best.—O time, come back to us again,
Come ravel out the stitches we have woven,
That we may now correct our sad mistakes,
And weave aright the fabric of our lives.—
Oh, would we had her back again!—Alas!
I know not but this broken heart must cease;
Its joy has fled, its hope is vainly crushed!

FATHER.

Don't say it, wife. Bear up! You can for me!—
I know it's hard, almost beyond our wills.—
But look! the roses snowy-white still bloom!—
Here, take this nosegay, plucked with bleeding heart;
It is my vow that God and you and she
Are all the chords this soul shall ever strike.—
We'll stand together, though our wounds are deep;
We'll stand together, though our backs do bend;
We'll stand together, though our hearts are crushed!

Standing together when joys overcome us,
Standing together when sorrows benumb us,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Standing together in sunshine and rain;
God is so good in his wonderful wisdom,
All that He gives us is infinite gain,
Sharing our joys they are evermore doubled,
Sharing our sorrows thus rends them in
twain;
Loving is ever the law of our being;
Selfishness always our infinite pain.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

VIII

In many a sorrow there's much of joy;
For many a wound there is healing balm;
Every shadow is skirted with sunshine serene;
Every tear mirrors back the glad warmth of some joy.
But apart, in the silence, uncheered and alone,
With the chill of a sadness, deep-seated in pain,
Dwell those who wait late for a vanished face,
Long lost in the distance of fleeting years;
Neglecting their ninety and nine waiting pleasures,
They grope in the depth of their one lengthening
shadow,
Apart and alone in their sickening sorrow.

MOTHER.

Yes, husband, it is just a year today,
Oh such a long, long year, since John's old mother
Died in sorrow. How it pains my heart
To think of her again. She was so good.
After her husband died, she ever waited
Patiently. Each day she slowly trudged
Down to the office for the long expected
Letter, ever saying 'It will come,
'Twill surely come today.' And thus she ever
Said, and ever trudged along alone,—
Never, it seemed, lost faith that John would write.

FATHER.

Yes, wife, I well remember the last time
She stopped to see if we had heard from them.
She told us o'er her parting scene with John,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

How he had promised he would write each week,
About his tear let fall upon her cheek;
She told it all again. Her faith in John
Was ever strong. She always knew he'd write
If he but had the chance.—'Twas thus she died.

MOTHER.

The last she spoke was in a fervent prayer,
A prayer for him, her darling boy.—She's dead;
And so we soon will be, unless our long
Lost girl returns. Our time is not far distant.—
Many a time and oft, we've prayed in tears,
Prayed daily she might come again to cheer
Us in our age, if haply she were living,
And something always tells us that she is.

FATHER.

We've heard it in the crowing of the cock,
That many times stands boldly on the step,
And seems to say, she's coming, coming soon.
And many a time the birds seem to forecast
Her quick return. And many a time in dreams
And nightmares we have seen her, always
It seems is coming, still is held away.

MOTHER.

And thus we've prayed and waited long, long years,
Until the frosts of time with silvered age,
Have brought the haggard look of longing pain,
Have brought the quivering step and broken voice
And withered form,—have brought almost despair.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

FATHER.

And still we've prayed and waited evermore.—
As for a much expected midnight guest,
The match is always ready on the chair
Beside our bed, if haply we may hear
Her longed-for rap upon the waiting door.—
And many a time we've had it in our minds
To search for her; but something ever tells
Us she will come, come soon, ere we could search.

MOTHER.

And many a time we've had it in our minds
To give her up in deep despair and lay
Us down in anguish, lay us down in death.

FATHER.

But something ever tells us she will come.

MOTHER.

Yes, think the signs we had but yesterday,
Signs that we think are never known to fail,
For everything I touched was sure to fall;
Her dish, the last that's left of all she had,
Slipped from my hand into a ruined heap.
All told that some one, e'en our darling girl,
Would come, would surely come, within an hour.
And still, the day has slowly lingered past,
And still the night is gone in weary dreams,
Has brought naught but another waiting day.

FATHER.

But somehow, I believe she'll come 'today';
Signs should be good, methinks, at least two days.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MOTHER.

Ah, so we've thought so many, many days.
If all the signs failed yesterday, she will
Not come today.

FATHER.

The morning church bell rings.

MOTHER.

We'll lock the door, although we seldom do;
But since she did not come home yesterday,
She surely will not come today.

FATHER.

What if

Perchance she comes and finds it locked?—We go.

MOTHER.

Ah, we have waited all the years,—so long!
Our heads are drooped beneath their weight of care,
Our hearts are mellowed by the frosts of sorrow.
Has God at last, you think, forsaken us?
We've prayed without cessation, prayed for years,
That we might see her darling face again,—
But once! Is God thus ever deaf and blind
To this, our earnest wish and heartfelt prayer?

FATHER.

Who knows but it is 'gainst His will? Who knows?
But she is happier where she is, than we?—
Maybe her beauty and her purity
Have held him from his drunkenness, who knows?
I've always thought that hell itself would gape

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

A sober breath at sight of her. Who knows,
But they may own a happy home, and dwell
With children molded in her image,
Prattling ever in perpetual mirth and joy?

MOTHER.

It cannot be. Had she been ever happy,
We would have known it. Wretchedness and sin
Are all that ever separate two souls
That once have loved. I have had many dreams
Of late. I've seemed to see a blot upon
The face of spring. A hideous monster
That scared the birds until they left our trees,
That even veiled the sunlight from our porch.—
It seemed 'twas ours.—If dreams are ever true,
She'll come!—And yet we've always thought she'd
come,—

The first year was a century through waiting.
How slow the time has poked and lagged. Methinks
Eternities of bliss were not so long
As these expectant years.

FATHER.

You've long borne up,
My faithful wife. Be not thus sad. Cheer up!
Our years of tears are nearly past. Cheer up!
She'll come; and then one minute will repay
For all these waiting years. And then in peace,
With her return, we well can live and die.
She'll nurse our age as we have nursed her youth.—

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Cheer up! For see! the trees are all a-joy
With winged song!

MOTHER.

I'm glad we're here at last;
The walk has tired me much. We'll ask for strength
To last another weary waiting week.

(Music within as they enter)

There is joy for all our sorrow,
There is rest for all our care,
There is hope for all our longing,
There is sunshine everywhere;
For our God is good, He loves us,
And each burden, rolls away,
With sweet peace, the gift of heaven,
Cheers us ever on our way.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

IX

As a wreck that is tossed on a rock-riven main,
With its timbers all shattered, its cordage in twain,
With the compass wrenched loose from its place at
the prow,
With the pilot's eye closed in his death-stricken brow,
When the engine has breathed its last life-giving
power,
And the captain lies dead at his post by the tower;
So sin, with its storms and its sickening waves,
With its mutterings and groanings and dark-hidden
caves,
Blows us far from our course, into desolate graves.

MARY.

Yes, here I come, come staggering home at last,
Besmirched in sin, e'en to its farthest depths.
In faded bonnet and in worn-out gown
Come trailing down the darkest filthiest alley
From the depot, fearing lest someone may now
Trace out these muddy faded features, know
'Tis I. Come back at last; alas, too late!—
See how the pigeons turn and fly away;
Ah, once they used to coo upon my shoulder.
See the children run in fear and hide;
They used to run to meet me with a smile,
And have my latest story. See! the birds
Hush their glad songs and scream in fear at me,
And fly away.—Yes, here I come again,
Come knocking on the scarce remembered door,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Come knocking as a tramp at this back door.—
I'm glad they are not here, the door is locked;
I almost wish that they were dead and gone,
But I will wait here on the porch a while,
And think it out again, the dream of youth.—
There in the old accustomed place, still stands
The rosary. There, with its pure white roses
Nodding in the breeze, shut off from all
The wide wild tumult of the wicked world,
In innocence and purity, it sheds
Its perfume, tintured from the crystal dew.
Ah, beauteous rose, with pure and stainless hue,
Once I was pure and stainless, e'en as you,
Once I was fair and innocent, once wild
And free, once I was glad and happy,
Babbling ever in glee. My fingers used to train
You into wreaths for my fair sunny brow,
I used to wear you on my snowy bosom.
I will be a child again e'en now, will pluck
A bunch of blossoms, wreath them with my smiles,
And crown my wearied brow.

Then dreamily,
She sorted out the fairest of the fair,
Returned and sat upon the porch to weave
The wreath.—She woke, the roses woke her
From her dream; a thorn was in her finger—
And her flesh.—O'ercome with wicked imagery
Of sin, her hopes all vanished now, she pulled
The pallid petals from their thorny stems
And flung them stained and bleeding on the ground.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MARY.

Oh horrors! I can never stand this strain,
This fearful strain, this sickening strain,
This mottled mockery.

And thus she swooned.

The wages of sin is death,
And the wages of pleasure, pain;
The normal life is the life of right,
That toils for others with matchless might,
Its wages is endless gain.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

X

The spring had come again, with all its heavenly bliss.
The birds, the winged angels of the earth,
With their return, had drawn another thread
Across the woof of years. The flowers unveiled
Their fairy faces to the coaxing sun,
And whispering spread the season's melodies.
The world, in all, was one unclouded smile,
In all, was just the same as it had been
So many, many years before. But they,
So sad to think, were both so changed, that now,
They hardly knew the season of the year.—
Would it were winter!—But they came at last,
Locked-arms, came up the old front steps,
Stopped just a minute in the waiting room
To pray again that she might come, their long
Departed, darling, angel girl. The mother stepped
Into the kitchen, with her thoughts perplexed;
The porch door opened hard, as though it pitied
Her, and dreaded much this fearful shock.
She saw.—Stood there transfixed as marble
While she raised the sunken eye, retouched
The lips with ruby, brushed away the furrows
From the forehead, plumped the wasted cheeks,
Replaced their roses and their smiles, recaught
Again the tangled sunbeams in the faded
Hair.—Then fully recognized, and screamed.

MOTHER.

Is't come to this! I did not see.—'Twas but
A monstrous dream!—It cannot be! This! this!

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

This once most perfect form! this golden hair!—
It cannot be!—Why did I live thus long?
Is this the prayer I prayed?—not this!—my prayer?
O God, I did not pray! I never prayed
For this!

FATHER.

What now? Is this a frenzied fit?—
I do not see aright!—'Tis but the blot
You saw within your dream!—Are these the curls
Of that once sun-lit brow? Now faded thus?
Is this the forehead that once graced your breast?
Now stained with sin? Are these the lips? now
parched?
That once were rubies red? And these the cheeks,
That were in all Aurora's blush? Now thus,
Thus hollowed, creased, and marred with sin?
Come in!
We'll lock the door, nor claim this mottled clay!
She is no more our child, our darling girl!

MOTHER.

There, husband, we have shut and locked the door.—
Oh, death with all its rankling sorrows, would
Be peace to this worn wasted form, that once
So like an angel shed perfumes.—
Is't come to this! Must we in our old age
Deny a rescue to the wreck we've caused
In part, through our neglect to clear away
The hidden rocks? We must not thus so do.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Is not the Lord more merciful than we?
We neither one are fit to throw a stone.

FATHER.

Have we not done the very best we knew?

MOTHER.

The best we knew; but not the best we should
Have known.

FATHER.

It's hard to cast her off thus, now,
When she's come back, a wounded bleeding lamb,
Beside the sheep-fold, but to die with those
She loves.—I cannot help to wound her worse.—
But shall we bring her in and nurse her now?

MOTHER.

She is our flesh and blood, let's bring her in;
The sun has parched too long her wasted form,
And fevered brow.

FATHER.

Let's bring her in.—God knows,
And God alone, the agony of this
Hard hour, of our life's disappointed hopes.—
The door is open. Look you on these rags,
These features so defaced.—But see, she wakes,—
Oh, why does she not sleep!

MARY.

Is this again
A drunken fever of debauchery?
It cannot be. The stench of belching hell?

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Hell never paints the likeness of this sight.—
Are these the only tattered remnants left?
These feebled parents? these who reared my life
In luxury in laps of ease? And this
The porch, in years ago that was my world?
Would it had ever been, and still could be.

FATHER.

See how she brightens up.

MOTHER.

The old look comes
Again. She is our own, our darling girl.

MARY.

Undone am I! Alas! why have I thus
Subverted life, deserted friends and home!—
Speak, mother, father, can you ever take
This wasted, hell-wrecked form within your door?—
I know I should not ask it.

MOTHER.

Yes, daughter, this
Has been our constant prayer through all the years,
To see your winsome face at home again,
Again before we slept in death.

MARY.

Is this
The sound of mortal voice that now I hear?
Oh, no, it cannot be; this is too sweet.
I have not heard its like in all the years,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

The slavish years of sin. How can I look
You in the face, I but deserve your scorn.

MOTHER.

Come, father, let's into the house with her.
This is of all the burdens in the world
Most precious in our hands. Be careful lest
We pain her that we love.

MARY.

Ah, woe is me!
You'll never see the answer to your prayers;
This face is mottled with the stains of sin!

FATHER.

Stop here within the kitchen. Bring them out,
Her clothes that in her bureau hang. Put on
The finest gown. Wash off the stain of years,—
And I'll into the other room and wait,
And think that she is winsome, pure and fair,
Will think this but a mockery, a dream.

MARY (alone).

Has it come to this! It surely is not true.—
Down, frightful devils, from your slimy caves;
You cannot rob me this life's one last joy
To live again my childhood o'er. I'll live
It even though hell quakes to its farthest limits.

FATHER (alone in parlor).

It's all as 'twas the day she left us here
To weep, and wait her longed-for coming home.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

What will she say, when this again she sees,
This room we've never changed?—Yet we're all
changed.—

Life's but a fraud, to think what might have been
Our joy and happiness through all these years.—
Life as it's lived, at best's but mockery,
A discord played upon a harp untuned,
Each string but catching up a tearful tone
Of some long-hoped-for joy that's crushed and
dead.—

We move forever 'twixt two worn-out words,
Surprise and disappointment; this is life.
Yet God is love; He tries to spare our pains,
He teaches us to know and live the truth,
To put aside the things that rob our lives.
He cannot fathom why we are so blind
And deaf to all the past has ever taught,
As not to put an end to this in life
That nurtures hell and wantonness.

MOTHER.

She comes!

This is the answer to our prayer of years;
Her face, transfigured now in youthful form
And childish beauty,—this is home again.—
Here, take this easy chair.

MARY.

Have I thus changed?

FATHER.

It saddens me! They say that ere the spirit

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Takes its flight, sweet angels hover near,
And kiss e'en fallen mortals back to youth,
Retouch the image marred by age and sin,
That God may know the child, returning home.

MARY.

And this the room? It all is as it was!

FATHER.

Yes, we have kept it thus with careful hands
Throughout the longing years of pain, we've waited
Ever ready your return, in prayer.

MARY.

Has sin thus so deceived me with the thought
Of banishment, if I returned to you?—
But wait, I'd sing again the olden song,
We sang together many years ago:

“Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home!”

There that will do. Alas! the frosts of time
Have quite undone us both; all's discord now.
These strings that once were fanned by melody,
Are harsh, this throat is hoarse with sinful life.

MOTHER.

No, daughter, this was heavenly concord quite.
This old piano's waited long your touch,
For it has never sounded since you left.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MARY.

Nor has this soul struck on its finer chords,
Since fate has handed it unto the ways
Of sin, since I have left you here alone
And followed up my fiery appetites.
But all this mocks me!—Down, ye hellish dreams!—
Is this my picture on the wall?

MOTHER.

Yes, you,

It is the only thing we've added since
You left. We could not have you here, and so
We've had you there. It's ever been the angel
Of our home.

MARY.

Ah, it is long since I
Have looked like this.—I fear—down hellish
forms!—
You think I'll ever look like this again?

FATHER.

Yes, sweeter far than this, for there's in store
An heritage eternal to ascend
The yawning abyss formed by sin's deceit.

MARY.

I know not, for I see strange fiery beasts,
And hellish forms, where'er I look. I fear—
I fear that this upon the wall is more
Than I can ever hope to be again.
My mind is blunted, and my soul is sick,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

My feet are shackled, broken are my wings,
Seared are my vitals, polluted is my flesh.
Oh could I fly as once I flew, I'd fly—

FATHER.

But those who cannot fly must walk, and those
Who cannot walk must crawl.

MARY.

How can I walk?

I cannot even crawl,—I dare not look
At God's stern awesome face, for fear He'll strike
Me dumb for such blasphemy.

MOTHER.

Do you not know

The story of the maid in Holy Writ,
Whom men in righteous wrath, would fain have
stoned?

But when the Saviour heard, He sweetly said,
Let him that hath not sinned, throw first his stone;
And then, when they were gone, He said to her,
Go, too, in peace, and sin no more.

MARY.

A ray

Of hope, above my awful writhing sea of sin.
That maid am I! Those self-same words I heard
This morn; I had forgotten them till now.
That's how it comes I'm here. O, had I heard
Them many years ago. 'Tis hard for me,
Thus steeped in sin, to hear. The awful din

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Of writhing spirits almost drives me wild.—
Down, down! ye hellish beasts! I dimly see
You vanquished. Yet you rise again to fight.—
Would there were mission ladies everywhere!
Would I could live again my life. I'd go
Into the dankest jaws of hell, and draw
From out their sickening depths, lost angels,
Such as I have ever been.—But I am now
Aweary; will you lay me down to rest,
And turn the couch so I can see the face
I wore when I was but a peaceful child?—
There, that will do. My head feels cooler now.
Would I had not defaced the image there
Upon the wall.—

MOTHER.

Who comes?

JOHN (in semblance, an old umbrella mender).

I heard a voice,
The voice of all the stringed melodies
Most musical.

FATHER.

Stand back, you villain monster!
Speak what you are that dares thus come to rob
Us of the only hour we've had in years.

JOHN.

I come to speak with her that was my wife.

FATHER.

Stand back, you heartless villain!

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MARY.

Cease, father, thus.—

Are those the hazel eyes that once looked out
Beneath a careless curl in mirth?

JOHN.

Ah, so!

Those days,—alas, they're gone! those heavenly days!
Who then would dare have prophesied me thus,
In semblance, an umbrella mender bowed
With grief?

FATHER.

Wife here, did prophesy far worse,
The worst that's been, when years ago, you were
The hellish infant of your father's home.
Get out! you scurvy villain, devilish thief,
That robbed this household of its costliest pearl!—
Get out! before I strike!

MARY.

Cease, father, thus.—

You rob me of the only joy that's left.
You shock my dizzy brain. It was not he
That thus you now behold, who robbed your hearth,
It was not he that left the old home cold
And cheerless. No, not he! He was my lover.
We two were born but for each other's joy.
As giant timbers, brought from distant hills,
Are mated for the ship, so we were made
Each other's counterpart in heaven. Ah, say

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

It not. It was not he that robbed our home.—
'Twas licensed whisky! licensed brothels! not he.
But why this waiting? I must know, e'en now,
Your years, since long ago we parted fair
To meet thus foul.

JOHN.

The story's hard to tell.
I wish you had not asked it; I had rather
Trace the devil now through hell, than this
Sad sickening story of my years of pain.
But I will tell it through, will make it short.
Yet, I had rather you should never know
This wretched misery.—You knew I killed
A villain—

FATHER.

Get you out! no murderer—

MARY.

Cease, father!

JOHN.

Who had drugged me for my money?
This was the only glass I ever thought
To drink.—The last and only glass I've drunk.—
You know I told you when I saw you last,
That he had pledged to help me get some work;
It was a friendly glass; 'twas drunk for you,
Drunk to secure his closer friendship,
And through that the work, to keep our treasure
Till the coming time when we'd return again

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

To this old town, as soon as we believed
Our parents' peevish anger would admit.—
You heard?

MARY.

Heard this? Why, no! Oh horrors!
But on! be quick!

JOHN.

You had not heard it?
Then I wish I had it safe away behind
My closed lips again. But it is told.—
The villain's brother, then, a bribed police,
Accomplice to the bloody crime begun,—
It makes me crave his blood to think of him!—
Took me in haste to trial, and in his greed,
Divided with the court my every cent.—
Thus, I was sentenced to imprisonment
For life. I had no friend but you. They said
You'd heard, had cursed the day you'd looked on me,
Had flown in safety home.

MARY.

Oh horrors!

Would that I had only heard!

JOHN.

We had not been
A week within the city, as you know.—
The rest's surmised. 'Tis toil and toil and toil
Through years of dull monotony. These hands,
Behold these calloused hands, if this you doubt,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

And this the muscle of my sinewy arm;
They are the only testimony, now,
To this, the truth.—Years came and went in sickening
Silence. I would have died, but for the thought
Of you, and of my angel mother.

MARY.

Oh worthy husband, this but proves the trust
I placed in you long years ago!—But on.

JOHN.

At last, when long and weary years had robbed
The flush and glow of youth, when toil had bowed
This rugged back, had shattered all these nerves,
Had crushed this hopeful will, then came my chance,
The one hour of my life. A fire broke out
Within the prison, near my place of toil;
I worked with giant strength and fought it down;
See, here, the scars upon my face and hands.
And then, at length, the longed-for pardon came—
But e'er it came, 'twas just a year today,
I felt, somehow that mother died. A silent
Message told the very hour. When freed
A month ago, I hastened home again,
And trudged up yonder hill to drop a tear
And lay some blood-red roses on her grave.
This done, I hastened here and hid myself
Where years ago, I waited you so oft.
I lay concealed a day and night to catch
A glimpse of you. I rose amazed at last
At what I heard, for in that morning prayer,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

I heard this aged mother raise her voice
In hopeful pleading, asking she might live
Until her long-lost darling girl should come
Again safe home to her. The first desire
Of all my life was now to bring you home.
I hastened to the city that same day,
And scarce since then have slept three hours a night.
I searched the city, scanning every face
In all the throbbing crowds. I stood at morn
And noon and night upon the street and watched,
Each day a different street; accoutered thus,
And making low weird tones to catch each eye,
Until I'd searched each street. At last, by chance,
I happened past a mission of the slums.
I asked if they had seen or heard of you.
They told me but an hour before, they'd sent
You home—I could not wait, I felt anew
The pulse of youth through all my being start.
I hastened to the depot, breathless paced
The floor—I could not wait—the hour seemed years.
The train drove snail-like, till at last I'm come
As thus I stand.

MARY.

Oh horrors! has't come to this!
Most noble husband, has it come to this!
Would I could tell my story; but I see
More hellishness displayed, than can be told.
We simple village folk were food for sharks,
For blood-suckers, for men of shameless sin!
I see it all! They told me you had fled,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Had cruelly deserted me for drink.
I never half believed it, never! though,
They took me in as loving friends, they said,
Gave me protection in a time of need;
Then took advantage of my broken heart.
I was so pure that all my world was flowers;
I knew not such a word as villain then.
They must have drugged my food; I'm certain now
They did, for I oft since have seen it done;
I was not half myself through hellish dreams.
They gave me liquor by degrees, to drown
My pain. Bad led to worse, till I became
A fallen woman. Then they mocked me
By the nickname, 'Fallen Angel!' We were way-
laid;
'Twas all the heartless plot of commercialized vice.

JOHN.

Yes, it was even so!

FATHER AND MOTHER.

Can this be true?

Can we so long have lived in ignorance?

MARY.

Hedged in by hell and shame, I lived long years
In deepest sin, nor dared return again
To this, my home. At last, my beauty gone,
A burned-out crater, I was driven forth,
Too black for e'en the blackest hell to hide.
Thus driven forth, half drunk and poorly clothed

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

I wandered here and there, without an aim,
Without a hope or care,—a mummied devil.
'Twas early Sunday morning, e'en this morning.
The church bells pealed their lofty chimes, but not
For such as I. Had I but even tried
An entrance anywhere, they would have belched
Me forth in holy horror.—So I walked,
Or loitered rather, every door in all
The city barred again my frightful form.
No one in all the crowds to whom I dared
But speak. I know not how it came, I chanced
To loiter past a Mission, when I caught
A strain of music, an old song I'd sung
When but a child upon my mother's knee.
I know not how I came to see again
The old home and be in my happy teens;
But ere I knew, I stood within the door.
And then the music ceased, and I again
Was what you see. Before I could retreat,
A mission lady held me by the arm
And had my story, asked about my home,
Then told me o'er the Bible story, mother,
You retold a little while ago.
She begged me let her send me home; and so
My story ends, thus blotted, marred and stained.
I'm dying now; yet there's an awful debt.
And ours is not the only one. There are
Vast thousands thus ensnared. I see, alas!
A wail arise, so black it hides the sun.
From every village, maidens lily-pure

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Go forth in innocence to fall a prey
To the cities' merciless greedy maw of vice;
From every village, men in the pride of youth
Go forth to be swindled out of their money and
 morals;
From every village, wails on wails arise
From waiting disappointed lonely parents.

JOHN.

Oh that I might but live to see the day
When this which robbed me of my wife and home,
When this that made my life a hell, is gone,
When each man knows and does his little part
In lifting those that are debased and wrecked,
When selfishness has had its restless day,
When love of God and man rules all the world!

MARY.

Oh that the world might read again the tale
Of Cain and Abel, till its heart did thaw;
Oh that it might but read in us the fallen,
The lesson that must some day soon be learned,
The lesson of protecting sympathy.—
I'm dying now, so 'tis no time to talk
Of what must come as sure as God is God;
I must prepare the future. Husband, out
A little while. I have a dying wish
That sears my very soul as coals of fire.
You shall come back to see me die. I'll have
Them call you. Think till then upon your future.—
He is gone!—Oh that we both were young again!—

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

But, father, mother, hear me in my last
Most earnest wish. When I was young, I could
Have had whate'er I asked, but foolish then,
I did not ask the things I should.

MOTHER.

You are
Our darling angel yet; ask what you will,
We'll grant it.

MARY.

Oh did I hear aright?
Then death is boundless joy!—I hesitate,
I'm now almost afraid to speak my last
Desire. I know you'll think it very hard
To grant.

PARENTS.

As parents we will hear.

MARY.

And grant?

PARENTS.

And grant!

MARY.

Then if 'tis granted, life will not
In all be wasted. Hear me now. How much
In money, house and land, have we?

FATHER.

About
Ten thousand dollars,—why?

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MARY.

Oh, is't so much!

I only wish 'twas twenty.

FATHER.

You can't ask

We give it him out there?

MARY.

No, father, far

From that.—But had I lived till you were dead,

And been obedient to you, then I

Had been the only heir; you grant it so?

FATHER.

You, daughter, are the only heir.

MARY.

Then 'tis well.

I ask you now, and God, Himself, I know,
Has prompted this my dying wish; I ask
You give your all, in money, house and land,
To found a refuge in the city slums,
Next where I slaved my life away. 'Twill help
To raise, in time, so many straying girls,
And work a world of good. I'd have it named,
The 'Fallen Angel,' not in pride, but that
The section of the city may recall
In it my wasted life, and thus be led
To sympathy of it through me. I'd like
You see it founded ere you die, and have
John help in the labor.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

FATHER.

'Tis difficult, this wish!
God knows, that all one's property is hard
To give.—How is it, wife?

MOTHER.

Your will and God's
Be done!

FATHER.

Yes, daughter, your last dying wish
Is granted, and at length shall be fulfilled.

MARY.

Then God be blessed, for in this dying hour,
I now can look Him in the face, and say,
My life, while 'twas a sacrifice upon
The Nation's altar, for the Nation's sin,
Has not been lived in vain. I see adown
The future years, that growing good shall come.
I would that I had many lives to thus
So give in death!—Now call my husband in.—
Your future?

JOHN.

I do not know, I cannot tell.
I am an outcast, hated everywhere;
The mark of Cain is on my scowling forehead.
The only friends I ever had in life
Are now both gone, with this your coming death.
The brand of murder is upon my soul,
And every one is 'gainst me. Oh that I, too,
Might die with you. But God seems pleased to have

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

Me live to drink the bitterest dregs,—enough
For both our lives, for I was most to blame
In all this pain. I am the rankest weed
That ever grew upon this sin-cursed earth.

FATHER.

'Tis not so bad; we have it planned for you.

JOHN.

Be quick and tell me, for I am willing
To do anything, live anywhere you say,
Go back to prison, if you'll have it so.

FATHER.

You are to live with us, to take her place
Within our home. Together, we shall live,
And spend our years in working out her wish.
Our all, our every dollar, goes to found
A place of refuge in the city, where
Perchance, some wasting life may be reclaimed.

JOHN.

Oh this is kindness, magnified a thousand
Times. How can I ever half repay it?
These hands are all that I can call my own.

MARY.

But I must go. The call has come. And as
I slowly go, get down again the Book,
The Book you gave me years ago. Give't John

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

To be his daily friend and guide. Now open
It where a golden curl lies pressed. 'Tis mine;
It grew when I was young and fair to see.
That Psalm was once most favored of them all.
I read it last the night I ran away;
See, there, the tear-stains that were made that hour.—
You have the place, now read.

JOHN.

Wait yet a little while.
I want to pledge you I will meet you there
In death. I pledge it now, as by this Book
I swear my life, my all, my every deed
And thought.

FATHER.

Yet wait! the roses, snowy-white!

JOHN.

That land will be all joy.—But think! the debt,
The debt of our lost lives must yet be paid
By some one, sometime, somewhere.

MARY.

Meant you a while ago you killed the man
Who met us at the station, who secured
Us rooms? Who later said he tried to get
You work?

JOHN.

Yes, him I killed.

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

MARY.

The more you were
Deceived. He 'twas who forced me be his slave.—
But all is well with God.

FATHER.

Daughter, here
Upon your breast, these roses snow-white;
They are my pledge that we will keep our vow.
They're plucked with longing heart, that's crushed
with pain,
With heart that waits and prays through coming
years,
The curse may be removed, that gives its all
In house and land to help displace the sin!

MARY.

Thanks, now I die in peace. You give your roses;
I, my lily-white life.—And John, make this
The solace of your future years.—Now read.

JOHN.

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death,

THE GIFT OF WHITE ROSES

I will fear no evil;
For thou art with me:
Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me
In the presence of mine enemies:
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;
My cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the
days of my life:

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

FATHER.

Peace! Peace! Our "Fallen Angel" is asleep!
Let's down upon our knees, before the Lord,
And call His blessing on our future task.

THE END.



I WOULD NOT WORK TO RUIN
OTHER LIVES, WHATE'ER THE
PRICE IT PAID IN GREEDY GOLD





THE NORMAL LIFE IS THE
LIFE OF RIGHT, THAT
TOILS FOR OTHERS WITH
MATCHLESS MIGHT, ITS
WAGES IS ENDLESS GAIN



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